

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 1996

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E.OMQQYTWC GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SP

SUBJECT: AREILZA'S VIEWS ON INTERNAL SITUATION

1. DURING MY CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER AREILZA MARCH 13 I ASKED HIM FOR HIS ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION.

2. AREILZA REPLIED THAT DUE IN LARGE TO PRIME MINISTER ARIAS' RATHER STRANGE PERFORMANCE THE IMPRESSION WAS GROWING THAT THE WHOLE REFORM PROCESS WAS MOVING AT AN UNACCEPTABLY SLOW PACE. DESCRIBING ARIAS AS "THE GRAND ABSENTEE" OF THE MOMENT, AREILZA SAID THE ARIAS PERFORMANCES AT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTER MEETINGS WERE UNUSUALM SOME DAYS HE SEEMED TO BE TOTALLY DISINTERESTED, OTHER DAYS IRRITATED, THEN OTHER DAYS ACTIVE. THE KING AND THE REFORMIST MINISTERS WERE MUCH TROUBLED BY HIS PERFORMANCE SINCE HE NO LONGER SEEMED TO BE INTERESTED IN GIVING ANY IMPULSE TO THE REFORM PROGRAM. HIS IMPRESSION WAS THAT ARIAS WAS UNDER STRONG PRESSURES FROM THE RIGHT AND THAT HIS REACTIONS WERE AFFECTED BY THAT PRESSURE.

3. AREILZA SAID THAT EITHER ARIAS WOULD HAVE TO BE REMOVED OR HE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE HAND IN KEEPING THE REFORM PROGRAM GOING. HE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HIS REMOVAL WOULD PRESENT DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS, BUT HE IMPLIED THAT THE FOUR OR FIVE REFORM MINISTERS COULD NOT MUCH LONGER TOLERATE THE LACK OF PROGRESSM AREILZA
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TOLD ME THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED THIS QUESTION AT SOME LENGTH

WITH THE KING WHEN HE HAD SEEN HIM ON MARCH 10.

4. AREILZA SAID THAT WITH REGARD TO RUMORS MILITARY TAKE OVER HE BELIEVED THERE WAS NO SUBSTANCE TO THEM AND THAT IN FACT THE MILITARY WANTED NO SUCH THING. HE RECALLED THAT THE OTHER DAY AT A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING ARIAS, IRRITATED BY SOMETHING WHICH APPARENTLY HAD BEEN SAID BY RIGHTIST GROUPS, HAD INDICATED THAT UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, THE BEST THING WOULD BE FOR THE MILITARY TO TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT. AT THAT POINT VICE-PRESIDENT FOR DEFENSE MATTERS SANTIAGO HAD INTERRUPTED TO SAY THAT THE MILITARY WANTED NO SUCH THING.

5. AREILZA WAS GREATLY IRRITATED BY THE SLOW PROGRESS OF REFORM MEASURES THROUGH THE CORTES, NATIONAL COUNCIL AND EVEN COUNCIL OF THE REALM. HE RECALLED FRANCO ATTACHED NO IMPORTANCE TO ANY OF THESE BODIES SINCE THEY WERE ALL OF HIS OWN CREATION AND UNDER HIS OWN POWERS. IF THEY HAD NOT BEEN TAKEN SERIOUSLY THEN, WHY SHOULD THEY BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY NOW. HE ADMITTED THAT THESE INSTITUTIONS WERE THERE AND COULD NOT BE IGNORED. BUT THEY SHOULD NOT PERMITTED TO HOLD UP REFORM. HE SAID THAT PRESIDENT OF THE CORTES FERNANDEZ MIRANDA WAS PLAYING A STRAIGHT GAME WITH THE REFORMERS AND WAS DOING HIS BEST TO KEEP THINGS MOVING. I TOLD AREILZA THAT I HAD RECENTLY TALKED TO FERNANDEZ MIRANDA AND THIS HAD ALSO BEEN MY IMPRESSION. I HAD MADE THE POINT WITH FERNANDEZ MIRANDA THAT IT WOULD BE A SERIOUS MISTAKE IF IT SHOULD BE SEEN IN THE COUNTRY AS WELL AS ABROAD THAT THE REFORM PROGRAM WAS NOT MOVING WITH THE RHYTHM WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAD SET.

6. IN CONCLUSION, AREILZA SAID THAT IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT SOME OF THE RECENT EVENTS HAD A ADVERSE EFFECT ON FRAGA'S POSITION, BUT HE DID NOT THINK THIS SIGNIFICANT. HE BELIEVED THAT CENTRAL AUTHORITY MUST BE DEMONSTRATED BUT THAT NONE OF THIS SHOULD PERMIT THE PACE OF REFORM TO BE SLOWED DOWN. HE ALSO EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT IT WAS HIGH TIME THE GOVERNMENT, AND PARTICULARITY ARIAS, OPENED A DIALOGUE WITH MEMBERS

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OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION TO TRY TO BRING THEM INTO THE OVERALL REFORM PROGRAM.

7. COMMENT: DURING MY VARIOUS CONVERSATION WITH AREILZA THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT I HAVE FOUND HIM TROUBLED AND CONCERNED BY THE PACE OF THE REFORM PROGRAM. THE TIME MAY BE COMING IF IT HAS NOT ALREADY ARRIVED, WHEN THE KING AND THE REFORM MINISTERS ARE GOING TO HAVE

TO PRESS ARIAS. AREILZA IS, OF COURSE NO GREAT ADMIRE
OF ARIAS AND IT SHOULD ALSO BE REMEBERED THAT AREILZA
HAD HIGH HOPES LAST YEAR OF BEING NEMED PRIME MINISTER.
I DO NOT DOUBT HE STILL HARBORS THESE HOPES, WHICH I
BELIEVE TO BE VAIN ONES.
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